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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER/ESPRUILL)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/04/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL SL

SUBJECT: PMDC MEMBER ATTACKED: WERE THE MOTIVES PERSONAL OR POLITICAL?

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (U) On March 2, PMDC Publicity Secretary Mohamed Bangura's home was attacked by a group of armed men. Allegedly shooting at Bangura's guards, the burglars splashed acid around his compound prior to absconding with a plasma TV, three laptop computers, and other items. Bangura escaped the attack unharmed, and claimed that he has no idea why he was targeted.

¶2. (U) Though the number of home burglaries has appeared to increase in recent months due to the poor economic conditions in Freetown, the use of acid is an unusual diversion from the routine modus operandi. Sierra Leoneans interpret the use of acid to be particularly threatening, and reminiscent of intimidation tactics during the war. This has thus created suspicion that the true purpose of this burglary was to quiet Bangura, who has been an outspoken critic of President Koroma's cabinet reshuffle. Another hypothesis, that members of his own party are trying to end his likely bid for the PMDC party chairmanship, has been publicly scuppered by Bangura himself. There is also a strong possibility that the burglary was due to a personal grudge.

¶3. (C) Political parties in Sierra Leone are known for resorting to brass knuckle tactics when engaging with one another, as evidenced by documented intimidation and violence during the recent elections. However, Bangura is a relative unknown outside of his own party, and his vocal opposition to the cabinet reshuffle is neither unusual nor particularly influential. Koroma and his APC party have faced much greater criticism since coming into power in November, 2008, and it seems unlikely that Bangura has stirred the pot enough to be seen as a significant risk to the party. However, the use of acid is unusual and post will monitor if it becomes a regular feature of burglaries in the future.

PERRY